



SOUTH LOUISIANA WETLANDS DISCOVERY CENTER SERVES TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC

With the help of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, a permanent home for the South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center in Houma is rapidly coming to fruition. While it has been operating since 2003 at the Terrebonne Folklife Culture Center, the SLWDC will be housed in its own facility, which is slated for opening around 2011-2012. The new facility will be located on Library Drive, just behind the Terrebonne Civic Center and across the street from the Terrebonne Parish Main Library.

A main part of the Center's mission is to educate the public on the variety of methods in which to preserve and conserve the wetlands. One of these methods is the Center's exhibit galleries, which are permanent fixtures of the facility. The exhibits are largely self-guided tours whose goal is to educate and inspire visitors on wetlands preservation. Galleries include the Outdoor Landscape and Wetlands Gardens, the Natural History Gallery, the Conservation Science Gallery, the Children's Wetland Discovery Area and the Louisiana Wetlands Theater.

As an educational asset for Terrebonne Parish, the Center will also serve the state as a focal point for tourists who are seeking to learn more about wetland processes, preservation and restoration. Educational and research opportunities concerning Louisiana's fragile wetland environment is a key focus of the Center, as students will have a variety of opportunities in which to learn and understand the wetlands environment. As a research facility, the Center will provide a central access point for intermediate and high school students and college professors who may be in need of scientific research labs.

Two educational models will be in place at the Center: An interpretive program focused on grades K-12, and a science-focused educational "research laboratory" for grades 4 through college-age will focus on the South Louisiana coastal environment. While each operates somewhat independently of the other, the pairing of the two entities contribute to a critical synergy that helps achieve the larger educational goals of the Center. The facility is family-oriented and offers something for all ages.

"The Center has a positive impact on the state level by helping to bring awareness of the issues concerning the fragile Louisiana coast and by demonstrating what makes it unique and worthy of saving," said Paul Guidry, Administrative Director of the South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center. "It is also helping to inform younger generations about the importance and need to conserve and preserve the wetlands."

With several events on the horizon, the Center has already reached beyond the classroom as a place for locals and tourists to gain an understanding of the unique wetlands in Louisiana through hands-on experiences. The Center hosted a World Wetlands event in February, and plans to host a Lady Bug Ball in April. Upcoming events include the Mandalay Nature Trail outing in early May, the Secret Garden tour in mid-May, and the "Celebrate our Wetlands" summer camp in July. Many opportunities for students are also available, such as a Night at the Museum, a Kids' Workshop for Senator Circle in Houma, and activities surrounding World Wetlands Day. The Wetlands Discovery Center will also play host to various fund-raising activities.

For more information, contact the center at (985) 580-7289 or online at: <http://www.slwdc.org>



Students experience a hands-on reptile encounter at the Terrebonne Folklife Culture Center



Artist's rendering of the proposed South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center